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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF GENERAL JOHN HANDY,
COMMANDER, USTRANSCOM

REF: ANKARA 1906

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ERIC S. EDELMAN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

1. (S) Summary: Your visit comes on the heels of a series of US visits since the first of the year (Deputy Secretary of State Armitage, NATO Supreme Allied Commander General Jones, Commander US Central Command General Abizaid, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Feith, Secretary of State Rice, US Army Europe and 7th Army Commander General Bell, and most recently Commander Naval Forces Europe, Admiral Mullen). You arrive in Turkey as we are emphasizing renewed dialogue on areas of mutual concern to maximize achievable cooperation. Our task is complicated by a government still questioning the value of the U.S.-Turkish relationship. Recently the Turkish General Staff (TGS) has been steadily, rationally, and publicly signaling a desire to make the relationship work, although there seems to be an overall resistance to the movement towards change coming from the EU and IMF. The reinvigoration of mil-to-mil engagement is therefore, a welcome and timely building block to this effort. End Summary.

Context of Your Visit

2. (S) While it is difficult to accurately gauge the depth of Turkey's feelings towards restoring the U.S.-Turkey mil-to-mil relationship to its pre-March 2003 levels, their eagerness to host General Bell's recent visit may serve as a reasonable barometer on this matter. Land Forces Commander General Buyukanit (likely to become CHOD in 2006), while charismatic, popular within the Army and adept at working the press, is also successful at playing his political cards close to his vest, and consequently has avoided becoming fixed to politically controversial positions (his nickname among many officers is "weathervane"). Members of his staff assert to us that he strongly favors returning to a robust military relationship with the U.S. and he used the visit to publicly demonstrate that relations with the US military are improving.

3. (C) Admiral Mullen provided the CHOD and DCHOD with an upbeat assessment of his recent visit to Iraq and highlighted Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces accomplishments since the Jan 30 elections. The CHOD and DCHOD expressed cautiously optimistic views of the situation in Iraq. Admiral Mullen also gained a better understanding of Turkish concerns about US and NATO desires to conduct operations in the Black Sea. General Ozkok stated he was not opposed to NATO's expansion, but he feared such a move could damage NATO's relations with Russia and possibly Ukraine. TGS officials congratulated Admiral Mullen on his nomination as Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) and reminded him that it had been 16 years since the last CNO visit to Turkey. Overall, visits by senior military officials and mil-to-mil engagements have been positive and are aiding in improving the bilateral relationship.

4. (C) That said, there have been several issues, which underscore the fragility of our relationship. An informal U.S. request in June 2004 to permanently base F-16 aircraft at Incirlik went unanswered and was withdrawn in January 2005. Despite the informal nature of the request and lack of written information, it still managed to surface in the Turkish press, where speculation over U.S. military intentions went wild. Also in June 2004, the U.S. formally requested the use of Incirlik AB as a Multi-Directional Cargo Hub, serving as an air bridge between Afghanistan and Iraq theaters. To date, the U.S. has not received an official response from Turkey. TGS leadership claimed in Sept. 2004 to have passed its endorsement to the government. Since then, MFA and Prime Ministry officials have repeatedly told us that the decision is at the inter-ministerial level and an answer will be forthcoming "soon". Given the consistent lack of responsiveness to mission inquiries, HQ EUCOM, in coordination with the Mission, decided to stop making further inquiries. After nine months we would normally assume that the lack of a response translates to "no". However, a recent flurry of press reports suggests the Turkish government may be close to a response. The media speculates that this decision may be an attempt by the Turkish government to mend

the US/TU relationship or to gain US support to defeat Armenian lobbyist efforts for passage of a Congressional resolution on alleged genocide. For more detail on this subject, please see Ankara 1906.

Iraq Dominates the Agenda

15. (C) The Turkish Government shares the goal of a unified, prosperous, democratic Iraq, at peace internally and with its neighbors. However, our intervention there is unpopular and has generated Turkish frustration and anger over a perceived lack of U.S. action against the PKK in northern Iraq, Kurdish separatism and designs on Kirkuk, as well as attacks against Turkish truck drivers. Bilateral relations were poisoned by grossly distorted Turkish media coverage of and irresponsible statements by senior GOT officials about the Fallujah operation late last year and incessant criticism of US actions--and inaction (such as against the PKK)--in Iraq. The EU decision on December 17 to begin accession negotiations with Turkey on October 3, 2005, may have provided the starting point for a small, but perceptible positive shift in relations. A series of high-level Administration and military visits at the beginning of this year pushed some Turks to stand up for the relationship, despite policy differences over Iraq.

16. (C) The Turks worry about long-term US staying power in Iraq, that events there could spiral out of control, and that Ankara could be faced with either a Shia-dominated government that they assert will tilt dangerously toward Iran, an intensified movement toward an independent Kurdish state emanating from northern Iraq, or both. Since the success of the Jan. 30 elections, however, Turkey appears to be taking a more constructive approach toward its policy in Iraq. Previous complaints of alleged voting fraud by Iraqi Kurds, disenfranchisement of Iraq's Turkmen population, and the non-participation of the Sunni Arab community have been replaced by a more positive tone.

17. (S) Despite the continued public opposition to our operations in Iraq, Turkey has provided valuable assistance. Ankara offered to send peacekeeping troops to Iraq in October 2003, approved the use of Incirlik Air Base tankers to refuel aircraft on support missions for both Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), authorized the transit of U.S. troops from Iraq on rotation out, and permits the transit (via Habur gate) of supplies for our forces and humanitarian goods. Turkey is active in reconstruction efforts, including providing electricity for Iraq, and training in Turkey of Iraqi diplomats, Sunni political groups and, as its main contribution to the NATO training mission, Iraqi security forces.

PKK - Unfulfilled Promises and New Direction

18. (S) Turkish government and military leaders understand that responsibility for dealing with terrorists within Iraq's borders will increasingly pass to the Iraqis. In hosting the January 2005 trilateral PKK talks, the Turks signaled their willingness to work together with the Iraqis on this shared problem. Still, they, and the public at large, remain bitter over their perception that the US has taken no steps in Iraq to fulfill President Bush's June 2004 pledge that that country will no longer be a base for terrorist operations against Turkey and they expect the US to remain engaged in the effort. Some in the Turkish military harbor the belief that the US acquiesces to (or supports) the PKK's presence in Iraq, continually citing unsubstantiated reports of US/PKK meetings. (NOTE: We also know that the military uses our lack of action against PKK/Kongra-Gel to needle the current AKP Government.)

19. (S) If confronted with this issue, you should remind the Turks about our long-standing efforts that make us Turkey's number one ally against the PKK: our listing of the PKK and all successor groups as terrorist organizations; our successful campaign to get the EU to do the same; and our assistance in rendering PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. You should refer back to the trilateral talks where, with the US role in Iraq more one of facilitator than actor, the Turks and Iraqis focused on concrete steps to pave the way for actions against the PKK, including establishing an intelligence-sharing mechanism and holding a legal experts meeting after the government is in place to discuss issues related to closure of PKK front offices and media outlets in northern Iraq and the handling of known PKK terrorists who are arrested. MNF-I is in the process of posting Tier I list of PKK terrorists on CENTRIX. This is a small but an important step by MNF-I and, once executed, should be appreciated by the Turks.

Global War on Terrorism

¶10. (C) Turkey took command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) VII in Afghanistan in February 2005, and will contribute over 1,600 troops. Ankara renewed its offer to lead a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan, but location was again a problem -- Turkey wants to take over a PRT in the north, while the Alliance needs PRTs elsewhere to fulfill ISAF expansion requirements.

¶11. (S) On the other hand, the current government has disbanded the anti-terrorism coordination center in the National Security Council which used to bring together the three main intelligence services (TNIO, Jandarma, and National Police), which otherwise have a spotty record of coordination. The absence of a coordination center raises severe questions about the direction of the Turkish anti-terrorism effort.

¶12. (C) Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq, the US and Turkey coordinate military assistance to Georgia and Azerbaijan, improving their abilities to protect important energy transport routes. Turkey subscribes to every arms control arrangement it is eligible to join, including the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), under which they offered to host a multi-functional (air-sea-land) exercise in ¶2006. We had hoped that the Turks would hold this in the Black Sea, especially given their own Operation Active Endeavor-like Operation Black Sea Harmony and their leadership in focusing the BLACKSEAFOR organization on prevention of trafficking. However, they have been reluctant to facilitate non-littoral states' operations in the Black Sea (see para 17 below) and the PSI exercise looks likely to occur in the Mediterranean. Turkey has also been mildly supportive of international efforts to press Iran to meet its commitments to the IAEA, and they publicly back the EU-3 process. The GOT has taken seriously information about Turks' involvement in the AQ Khan network and is moving toward prosecution of these individuals. Turkey's stance on Syria has been disappointing: The government has consistently been behind the curve on pressuring Syria to withdraw from Lebanon. The government and many in the military view Bashar Assad as a would-be reformer contending with old-line Ba'athists. Their policy assumption is that Assad represents "stability" and the possibility of gradual change.

¶13. (U) The Turkish military's Partnership for Peace Training Center in Ankara provides counter-terrorism and other training to personnel from PfP partner countries. The military has established a NATO Center of Excellence-Defense Against Terrorism (COE-DAT), that will provide more specialized training opportunities for both NATO partner nations and Allies. Currently the TRADOC LNO, a U.S. Army Major, stationed here in Ankara, is serving part time. The U.S. Navy has offered to provide a Navy Captain as the Deputy Director/Project Officer, and the Joint Staff recently agreed to staff two additional US positions (one O4 and one E6) at the center. The TGS has also offered training at the COE-DAT as Ankara's contribution to NATO's Iraq training mission.

Political and Economic Backdrop

¶14. (S) Despite resentment and suspicion of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) by the military and other elements of the secular elite, Prime Minister Erdogan long appeared unassailable, with a two-thirds majority in parliament and a high personal popularity in the heartland. Erdogan's frequent trips abroad and discontent and corruption in the party and Cabinet signal that AKP has peaked and is in a stall. Since December, the government has lost energy and has begun to drift. Resurgent nationalism threatens to fill the leadership void. Despite resentment and suspicion of AKP by the military and other elements of the secular elite, there is currently no alternative to PM Erdogan's AKP government. Resignations are slowing eroding AKP's parliamentary majority, but Erdogan remains popular. With the political opposition virtually non-existent, the only opposition is in effect, the military. However, TGS Chief, General Ozkok, while a solidly pro-Atlanticist senior commander, is reluctant to take on the government publicly for fear of derailing Turkey's EU accession and thereby losing popular support for the military. Deputy Chief of Defense General Basbug's (in line to become CHOD in 2008 after General Buyukanit) repeated emphasis on the breadth, depth, and importance of relations with the U.S. during his January 26 televised press conference (the first such conference to be televised), might signal a subtle shift in TGS reluctance to confront the government publicly. General Ozkok has moved step-by-step to try to bring more modern thinkers into senior ranks, but left-nationalist sentiments are strong at lower ranks.

¶15. (U) The Turkish economy has recovered strongly from the

financial crisis of 2000-2001 and GDP grew 8.9% in 2004. However, the recovery remains vulnerable due to a large current account deficit (over 5 percent of GDP) and a large debt with a short maturity structure. Unemployment and poverty remain high, and ordinary people have not felt much benefit yet from the overall macroeconomic improvement. Turkey remains too reliant on Russian energy sources (a point the Russians are trying to use as leverage for political gain). Macroeconomic success has also bred a sense of complacency about the need to persist with difficult reforms, such as privatization and reform of the banking, social security and tax systems. These reforms are being addressed in the new three-year standby program that the IMF and GOT are in the process of finalizing.

¶16. (U) Due to historic economic/political volatility and opaque regulatory/judicial systems, Turkey has long received less foreign direct investment than other countries of similar size and potential. Many in the Turkish elite are convinced that there will be a flood of foreign investment in the wake of the EU's December decision to open accession negotiations with Turkey in October. However, this is unlikely to materialize unless more is done in the area of structural reform. In addition, there appears to be a lack of appreciation for the enormous challenges Turkey will shoulder in the accession negotiations, for the fact that EU accession will affect nearly every aspect of their lives, and for the likelihood that it may in the end be quite costly for Turkey to comply with EU directives in environmental protection and other areas.

TRANSCOM ISSUES

¶17. (C) Suggested Talking Points:

-- OEF/OIF Tanker Refueling Operation: USTRANSCOM appreciates Turkey's support for allowing the U.S. to utilize Incirlik AB as a forward deployment base for air refueling aircraft. To date U.S. tankers have off loaded more than 14 million pounds of fuel to awaiting aircraft. Additionally, appreciate your governments support in allowing over 8,500 U.S. troops to transit out of Iraq in latter part of 2003 and beginning of ¶2004.

-- Transit of Italian equipment: Welcome Turkey's assistance for the US movement of Italian equipment through Incirlik to Afghanistan. Appreciate Turkey's support for both Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the NATO ISAF mission.

-- Air Operations for OEF/OIF: Extremely pleased with Turkey's cooperation in regards to granting diplomatic clearances for OEF/OIF. We will continue to educate our pilots and planning staffs on abiding by guidelines contained in these clearances.

-- Cargo Hub: (IF RAISED ONLY) Understand your need to closely consider our request. We would welcome your positive response. However, our missions in Iraq and Afghanistan are ongoing. If you cannot respond positively, we will find other options, as we have done up until now.

¶18. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
EDELMAN